

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 121119Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3353
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6837

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT IN
SUBJECT: WHITHER THE CONGRESS PARTY

REF: NEW DELHI 6593

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. AS REPORTED REFTEL, MRS. GANDHI WAS SUCCESSFUL IN INSTALLING HER NOMINEE AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY: FORMER HOME MINISTER BRAHMANANDA REDDI. SHE BACKED HIM AS ONE WHO WOULD DO HER BIDDING AND AS ONE WHO, BECAUSE HE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EMERGENCY, WOULD DEFEND MRS. GANDHI AND HER ADMINISTRATION. TWO QUESTIONS EMERGE: HOW WAS SHE ABLE TO IMPOSE HERSELF ANEW ON THE CONGRESS PARTY AND WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY WHICH SHE FOR THE TIME BEING DOMINATES?

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A MAJORITY OF SENIOR CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS BELIEVE THAT MRS.GANDHI CONTINUES TO HAVE A NATIONAL FOLLOWING GREATER THAT OF ANY OTHER CONGRESS POLITICIAN AND THAT THIS IS A CRITICAL ASSET FOR THE PARTY. THERE IS ALSO UNCORROBORATED SPECULATION THAT MRS. GANDHI CONTROLS FUNDS BADLY NEEDED BY THE PARTY.

FOLLOWING REDDI'S ELECTION THERE HAVE BEEN RESIGNATIONS AND THREATS TO RESIGN FROM THE PARTY. FOR THE MOMENT, THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY SEEMS LOCKED IN PLACE FOR WANT OF ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO. THERE HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS FROM AMONG THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS", MOST PROMINENT OF WHOM IS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER DINESH SINGH. HE AND OTHERS HAVE PROTESTED THE FAILURE OF THE PARTY TO REFORM FOLLOWING ITS ELECTORAL DEBACLE. REDDI'S ACCESSION AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT HAS ALSO BADLY SPLIT THE CONGRESS IN THE SOUTHERN STATES.

FOR THE NEAR TERM, THE CONGRESS PARTY WILL BE UNABLE SIGNIFICANTLY TO PLAY ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS THE UNIFIER OF INDIA'S DIVERSE GROUPS. THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO REVITALIZE THE PARTY, AND 1977-78 ARE FORECAST AS BLEAK YEARS. THE LONGER TERM OUTLOOK FOR THE CONGRESS, FUNCTIONING MAINLY AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY, IS BRIGHTER. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY THREE GROUPS IN THE CONGRESS PARTY: THE CONSERVATIVES WHO AT LEAST TACITLY SUPPORTED THE EMERGENCY, THE LEFT WING WHICH HAS SUPPORTED POLITICAL ALLIANCES WITH THE CPI AND WHICH NOW IS CRITICAL OF THE "EXCESSES" OF THE EMERGENCY, AND THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS" WHO NOW ARE ALSO CRITICAL OF THE EMERGENCY. THE RESULTS OF THE MAY 6 ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE (AICC) POLLING (REFTEL) INDICATE THAT THE FIRST OF THESE GROUPS PREDOMINATES. EIGHT OF THE TEN ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE ARE FROM THIS GROUP AND ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER

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PM. IN THEIR VIEW MRS. GANDHI STILL HAS A PERSONAL FOLLOWING GREATER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER CONGRESS LEADER, AS ASSET WHICH IS CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY. OTHERS SPECULATE THAT MRS. GANDHI'S ABILITY TO CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE PARTY IS IN LARGE MEASURE DUE TO HER CONTROL OF FUNDS. THE PARTY COFFERS ARE REPORTEDLY ALMOST EMPTY, BUT SHE IS RUMORED TO POSSESS MUCH OF THE MONEY COLLECTED FROM BUSINESS FIRMS TO FINANCE THE LAST ELECTION. GIVEN THE REDUCED ABILITY OF THE CONGRESS TO RAISE MONEY, THE MONEY WHICH SHE ALLEGEDLY CONTROLS IS CONSIDERED CRUCIAL.

2. DESPITE ITS INABILITY TO ELECT S.S. RAY, FORMER CHIEF MINISTER OF WEST BENGAL, AS PARTY PRESIDENT, THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY WILL PROBABLY NOT DEFECT. THIS IS LESS OUT OF LOYALTY THAN THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOWHERE ELSE TO GO. GIVEN THE AFFINITY FOR THE CPI OF LEFT-WINGERS SUCH AS FORMER STEEL MINISTER CHANDRAJIT YADAV, FORMER PARTY PRESIDENT D.K. BAROAH, AND FORMER LABOR MINISTER RAGHUNATHA REDDY, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEY WOULD FIND A PLACE IN THE JANATA PARTY.

WHILE THERE ARE RUMORS OF PLANS BY INDIVIDUALS IN THIS GROUP TO DEFECT, WE SUSPECT THAT THIS IS INTERNDED BY THEM TO INCREASE THEIR BARGAINING POSITION WITHIN THE CONGRESS.

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3. MOST LIKELY TO DEFECT ARE THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS"
THE MOST PROMINENT OF THEM TO DO SO THUS FAR IS THE FORMER
FOREIGN MINISTER, DINESH SINGH, WHO PULLED OUT WITH NINE
OTHER SENIOR CONGRESSMEN. SINGH IS QUOTED BY THE PRESS
AS SAYING: "WE EXPECTED A CHANGE IN THE PARTY'S FUNCTIONING
AFTER LIFTING THE EMERGENCY. THERE WAS NO CHANGE, THERE
WAS NO INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY". WHILE THE FORMER MINISTER
FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY PALANNING, KARAN SINGH (ONE OF THE FEW
CONGRESSMEN TO BE RETURNED TO THE PARLIAMENT FROM THE
NORTH) HAS NOT YET RESIGNED, HE LAMBASTED THE "PRESENT POWER
STRUCTURE IN THE PARTY" IN A LETTER TO ITS PRESIDENT. HE
SAID THE CONGRESS IS TODAY " FACING A MASSIVE CRISIS OF PUBLIC
CONFIDENCE" AND THAT THE ONLY WAY FOR THE PARTY TO RETURN
TO ITS FORMER ROLE IS "TO UNDERTAKE A SUSTAINED EXERCISE IN
RUTHLESS INTROSPECTION, CLEANSING AND SELF-PURIFICATION."
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HE CRITICIZED THE PARTY LEADERSHIP FOR HAVING LEARNED NOTHING FROM ITS DEFEAT AND PREDICTED ANOTHER "MAJOR DEBACLE IN THE STATE POLLS.

4. ANOTHER SENIOR CONGRESSMAN TO ATTACK THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP IS THE FORMER SPEAKER OF THE LOK SABHA, B. R. BHAGAT. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS CONTEMPLATING RESIGNING. FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT, H. M. TRIVEDI, WHO LABELS HIMSELF A "TECHNOCRAT", RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY CLAIMING THAT IT WAS NO LONGER POSSIBLE FOR PERSONS LIKE

HIMSELF TO CONTRIBUTE "TOWARDS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE IDEALS OF THE CONGRESS".

5. ON A REGIONAL BASIS THE PRESS HAS REPORTED SERIOUS DEFECTIONS FROM THE CONGRESS IN ASSAM AND OTHER PARTS OF THE NORTHEAST. MORE IMPORTANT IS THE IMPACT WHICH THE SELECTION OF BRAHMANANDA REDDI AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT WILL HAVE ON THE PARTY'S POSITION IN THE SOUTH. THE KERALA CONGRESS PARTY HEADED BY A. K. ANTONY, WHO IS NOW THE CHIEF MINISTER FOR THE STATE, HAD SUPPORTED S.S. RAY OVER REDDI. ANTONY REPORTEDLY WAS THE ONLY PERSON AT THE GAUHATI MEETING OF THE AICC LAST NOVEMBER TO CRITICIZE THE EMERGENCY. IN KARNATAKA, THE PARTY IS SPLIT, WITH A MAJORITY BELIEVED TO HAVE SUPPORTED S. S. RAY. AND IN REDDI'S HOME STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH, HIS SELECTION HAS VERY MUCH DISPLEASED THE CHIEF MINISTER, VENGAL RAO, A LONG-TIME POLITICAL OPPONENT. IT ALSO BROUGHT ABOUT THE RESIGNATION OF K. RAGHUREMAIAH, FORMERLY MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND CHIEF WHIP IN THE LOWER HOUSE. POLITICAL RIVALRY BASED UPON CASTE IS SAID TO EXPLAIN RAGHURAMAIAH'S ANTIPATHY TOWARD REDDI. IN SUM, THE CONGRESS PARTY IS BADLY DIVIDED THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH.

6. THE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE CONGRESS PARTY WAS
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THAT IT UNIFIED THE COUNTRY BY HARMONIZING THE INTERESTS OF INDIA'S DIVERSE CASTE, RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND LINGUISTIC GROUPS. FOR THE NEAR FUTURE THIS ROLE HAS BEEN SUSPENDED. AT PRESENT THERE IS NO SERIOUS THINKING WITHIN THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP AS TO HOW TO REVITALIZE IT. THE OLD DEFEATED LEADERS WITH THEIR OLD IDEAS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE. 1977 AND PROBABLY 1978 ARE EXPECTED TO BE BLEAK

YEARS. A SENIOR AICC STAFFER TOLD US THAT THE SOMEWHAT
LONGER TERM PICTURE FOR THE CONGRESS PARTY WAS BRIGHTER.
IN THE FIRST PLACE THERE IS A NEED FOR AN OPPOSITION PARTY,
AND THIS ROLE WILL ASSURE THE PARTY'S EXISTENCE. SECONDLY,
THOSE CONGRESSMEN WHO WIN OFFICE AT THE STATE AND
NATIONAL LEVELS WILL HAVE GENUINE POLITICAL CREDIBILITY AND
THEY WILL COME INCREASINGLY TO DOMINATE THE PARTY. AND
FINALLY, THE PARTY HAS AN IMPORTANT ASSET IN ITS ORGANIZATIONAL
STRUCTURE WHICH WOULD SURVIVE TO SERVE A STRENGTHENED PARTY
AT A LATER DATE. WE FIND HIS REASONS CONGENT.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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TAGS: PINT, IN, CONGRESS PARTY, (GANDHI, INDIRA)
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